DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 172 251 CS 204 914

AUTHOR Bataille, Robert R.
TITLE The University and the Community College: Responsibility as a Two-Way Street.
PUB DATE Apr 79
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (30th, Minneapolis, Minnesota, April 5-7, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Community Colleges; *English Departments; *English Programs; Higher Education; *Interinstitutional Cooperation; *Interschool Communication; *Universities

ABSTRACT

If there is to be communication and mutual assistance between community colleges and universities, three myths about community colleges need to be dispelled: that they teach almost nothing but basic or remedial English, that no research is possible for those university people who study community college English programs or for community college instructors themselves, and that community college English programs are primarily oriented toward vocational/technical interests when they are not remedial. Behind the myths are varied, complex, and flexible community colleges. The university English department can be responsible to the community college English department by keeping the lines of communication open, by having training and internship programs for future community college English teachers, by initiating an exchange program for the faculties, and by offering course work and inservice workshops for community college instructors. The community college can assist the university by sharing its expertise on how to help the "new student" who is almost solely career oriented and how to cope with the problem of motivation for such new students. (TJ)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED172251

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Robert R. Bataille

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

The University and the Community College: Responsibility as a Two-Way Street

Robert R. Bataille

This section is devoted to the topic of our responsibility to all writing teachers. One way for universities who purport to train two-year college English teachers to be responsible to those would-be teachers is to make a committed effort to know the two-year college well. You cannot be responsible in a vacuum of ignorance. To this end, I would like briefly to discuss, by way of noting some myths about community colleges held by some denizens of four-year schools, what kinds of support a university English department might provide for the two-year schools in its area and where the university in turn might receive support from the community college.

If what we owe two-year college teachers first is a right understanding of what they and their institutions are, then one myth that needs adjustment is the one that holds that community college English departments teach almost nothing but basic or remedial English. But in truth the variety and complexity of a community college--I speak of the comprehensive college--are often surprising to those who are unfamiliar with these schools. Two springs ago, Des Moines Area C.C. offered a number of different kinds of composition and reading courses, including remedial, self-paced instruction, developmental reading, college preparatory composition (emphasizing persuasive writing and the term paper), study skills, business English, traditional and experimental literature courses, and EFI, together with a number of

CS204914

sections of general education composition courses based on the narration-description-exposition model. Of the more than forty-five sections that were offered, only five of these could be readily called remedial sections.

Another myth has it that little or no research is possible for those university people who study community college English programs or for community college teachers themselves. While it is undeniably true that most community college instructors, faced with a load of five courses, four of which are likely to be writing courses of some kind, are hard-pressed to find time for their own work, research work is possible. Let me illustrate with a statistic and an example. In a recent article published in the ADE Bulletin, Professor Elizabeth Cowan noted that there are over 1,300 different occupational programs offered by this nation's two-year colleges.[1] If this figure is correct, then the implications for research as well as for teaching are enormous. Let me be conservative and assume that of those 1,300 programs writing skills are important in only twenty percent of them. Even so, that would mean 260 different kinds of written communication problems and, yes, genres, which would undoubtedly many of them yield worthwhile directions in research and curriculum development.

If you are skeptical that we need to investigate very badly at least some of this writing that, unknown to us, might be required by students in disciplines we have always taken for granted or ignored, I have one example that should suffice to convince you otherwise. A graduate student at the University of Virginia who was teaching in a

community college reported to me upon a fascinating project he was working on with nurses at a hospital specializing in long-term care. He discovered, as he was teaching these nurses in class, that to his surprise these nurses were required to do an enormous amount of writing. Most of this writing was done in an effort to provide doctors with a day-by-day, week-by-week detailed account of each patient's condition. These nurses were, in effect, writing minibiographies of their patients, and the graduate student began to aid them in this work. Among other things, he was attempting to deduce their implied heuristic and to formulate the unstated conventions of the form.

The third and last myth I would like to deal with is the one that holds that community college English programs are primarily vo-tech oriented when they are not remedial. The reality is that such orientation differs drastically from college to college and is in no way universally true. Iowa Valley Community College with campuses at Iowa Falls and Marshaltown, Iowa, is an example of a school with very little vo-tech English. Iowa Falls enrolls over 800 full-time students, two-thirds of whom are liberal arts students; the advanced writing courses here are not in technical areas at all but are in creative writing. This school, incidentally, ran a poets series two years ago, with poets such as Mona Van Duyn and Gary Gildner, that was far superior to most such series I have encountered in four-year schools. In addition, at both schools there are honor courses which were once better populated than they are now. The course has declined primarily because the same students who would normally take it are

being competed for by the state's liberal arts colleges.

Behind the myths, then, is the reality that shows how varied and complex and flexible community colleges are. The last term, flexible, is perhaps the keynote to understanding the community college English department. These departments--indeed, the schools themselves--must be flexible; their survival depends upon it. Often other departments ask the community college English department to develop a course slanted toward that other department's majors, a phenomenon that is just beginning to occur in some four-year schools. All this complexity and flexibility, then, are what universities must keep in mind if they are to be responsible in any meaningful and useful way to the community college.

How, then, might the university English department be responsible to the community college English departments in its area? One way would be to keep the lines of communications open. There should be at least one liaison person on any major university English department's staff whose major function is to communicate directly with community college departments on matters of mutual concern. This is particularly true if that university, as many universities now do, is supposed to offer training programs particularly designed for future community college English teachers.

If such a training program exists, then an internship is absolutely necessary, for prospective teachers need to come to know their future environments at first hand. In addition, a mutual learning situation can be established if the university can initiate an exchange

program between its faculty and community college faculty. Such an exchange, although difficult to begin because of differing calendars, teaching loads, and the like, might nevertheless prove to be mutually beneficial for reasons I will get to in a few minutes.

Finally, university departments could offer course work and in-service workshops for community college instructors in those areas the community college requests and in which the university is likely to possess experience and expertise. The wide area of applied linguistics is one such example of where the university English department might aid the community college; I mean here applied linguistics in two important areas: composition and EFL. At Iowa State, where we have a long history of EFL and over 1,200 foreign students who need various kinds of English instruction, we some time ago sent out a questionnaire designed to find out whether or not schools in the Iowa, Missouri, and Nebraska region would be interested in workshops and short courses aimed at solving the variety of problems created by EFL students and courses. The response was surprisingly positive, especially from community colleges which were interested in workshops dealing with EFL materials, testing and placement, and the like. I cite this only as one possible example of where the university certainly can and should be responsible to writing teachers in community colleges. Such in-service efforts are more likely to prosper than regular courses and are more practical than revamped graduate programs because growth has slowed even in the dynamic urban community colleges and that fact, combined with Proposition-13 mentality, means that fewer new staff

are going to be hired in the future, especially on a full-time basis.

It is also probable that many community college instructors, who were, like the rest of us, trained before linguistics came to be seen as a useful handmaiden to both the teaching and researching of composition, have not had a great deal of training in that subject. Yet, as I found out last year during a study I conducted of Iowa's community college English departments, a number of instructors would have liked to have had such training in linguistics as it relates to composition.

Here again might be a chance for the university to be responsible to the community college by running short courses, workshops, or whatever that would deal with such matters as tagmemic heuristics and the use of error analysis for aiding native speakers. Then there is sociolinguistics, which has given us an appreciation of the various styles, from intimate to academic, which has shown us when to use these varieties, and which has made us aware of the importance of understanding dialectal varieties as well. Because they have to deal with a more diverse audience than many four-year instructors, community college teachers may in fact find sociolinguistical knowledge more useful than their four-year school peers do.

Universities could also be responsible by sharing the latest research results in rhetoric, information theory, and technical and business writing, but I want to conclude by recurring to something I said a minute or two ago. I stated that a mutual learning situation might be developed if the university and the community college

can establish some sort of faculty exchange. What I meant to get at is that universities themselves, especially university English teachers, have something to learn from community colleges. What they might learn particularly is how to deal with what has been called, since the 1971 publication of Patricia Cross's Beyond the Open Door, the "new student." This is the student who, before the egalitarianism of the 60s, probably would never have attended college, the student whom Cross calls "career-oriented to the point of being anti-intellectual."[2]

That the two-year college has had to deal with this student and is doing so with at least some success is attested to by a recent collection of essays edited by Walker Gibson, New Students in Two-Year Colleges. (And I say this despite the fact that two kinds of those newer students are not mentioned--mature women and senior citizens.) But of course the new student is appearing now in the four-year college and university and is doing so in sufficient numbers to cause the establishment of remedial efforts in writing and reading, the expansion of study skills courses, and the swelling of reading and writing clinics or centers.

And it is just because the community college has had to adapt itself to such audiences (remember the term, flexibility) that it may very well have something to teach the university about how to cope with the "new student." This adaptation has produced in community colleges self-paced, workshop courses modeled on the Garrison method or other varieties like that developed at Northern Iowa by

Mariestelle Brown. It has also produced the writing and reading laboratories whose efforts are coordinated with each other at Ellsworth Community College in Iowa Falls. And it has produced the writing workshop at Muscatine Community College where the director already has her "new students" working with basic EFL materials adapted to the needs of the native speaker of English.

Of course the biggest problem with the new student for many community college instructors is the problem of motivation, particularly in the English classroom. Frustrated and sometimes embittered by past experiences with English, such students are not at all interested in being in the community college English instructor's class to begin with. And it is quite probable that because the universities are beginning, more and more, to attract such students in order to maintain enrollments, these four-year schools will be seeking to learn from the two-year school how to cope with these new students. When that time comes, we may learn that responsibility is a two-way street, that, in short, being responsible means not only teaching the community college English instructors but also learning from them as well.

Robert Bataille
Iowa State University
June 28, 1979

Notes

1. Elizabeth Wooten Cowan, "Some Jobs Are More Perfect Then Others," ADE Bulletin, No. 58 (September 1978), 10.

2. Quoted by James R. Doherty, "Three Ways of Looking At An Open Door," p. 5, in New Students in Two-Year Colleges, ed. Walker Gibson (Urbana: NCTE, 1979).